Component of Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-008-X
Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division

Article

Inuit Language Indicators for Inuit Children Under the Age of Six in Canada

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June 2010

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June 2010

Catalogue no. 89-643-X

ISBN 978-1-100-16162-4

Frequency: Occasional

Ottawa

Cette publication est également disponible en français.

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.	not available for any reference period
..	not available for a specific reference period
...	not applicable
0	true zero or a value rounded to zero
0s	value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
p	preliminary
r	revised
x	suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
E	use with caution
F	too unreliable to be published

Inuit language indicators for Inuit children under the age of six in Canada

Our language is who and what we are and the health of our language lies at the core of our well-being.

— Mary Simon, President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2008 Arctic Indigenous Language Symposium, Tromso, Norway

Background

This fact sheet looks at the use of the Inuit language in the homes and communities of Inuit children under the age of six living in Canada. Findings are based on data from the 2006 Aboriginal Children's Survey, with some additional information from the 2006 Census of Population. Inuit of the Western Arctic are known as 'Inuvialuit'. In this fact sheet, the term Inuit includes Inuvialuit.

Young Inuit children in Canada

In 2006, the Census counted about 7,000 Inuit children under the age of six in Canada. Most (84%) lived in one of four regions that comprise Inuit Nunangat* which means 'Inuit homeland' in the Inuit language. These regions are: Nunatsiavut in northern Labrador, Nunavik in northern Quebec, the territory of Nunavut, and the Inuvialuit region in the Northwest Territories. The remaining 16% of Inuit children under the age of six lived outside Inuit Nunangat.

Map 1
The four regions of Inuit Nunangat

Source(s): Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami

* At the time the Aboriginal Children's Survey data were collected, the term for the Inuit homeland was 'Inuit Nunaat'. More recently, the term has changed to 'Inuit Nunangat'.

There are five main Inuit language dialects spoken throughout Canada: Inuvialuktun, Inuinnaqtun, and three different dialects of Inuktitut. In this fact sheet, these dialects are collectively known as the Inuit language. While some dialects have many speakers, others have a smaller number.

The Inuit language is one of only three Aboriginal languages in Canada spoken by a large enough population base that long-term survival is likely (Norris, 2007). However, over time, the percentage of Inuit able to converse in the language has decreased, as has the percentage of those speaking the Inuit language as their main language at home (Statistics Canada, 2008).

These changes can be attributed to many factors. For example, the passing down of the Inuit and other Aboriginal languages across the generations was greatly disrupted by residential schools in Canada, where the use of these languages was prohibited (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). In addition, 'loss is linked to intensive contact with non-indigenous populations where Inuit... were pressured to adopt the dominant language and culture' (Tulloch 2008).

Speaking and understanding the Inuit language

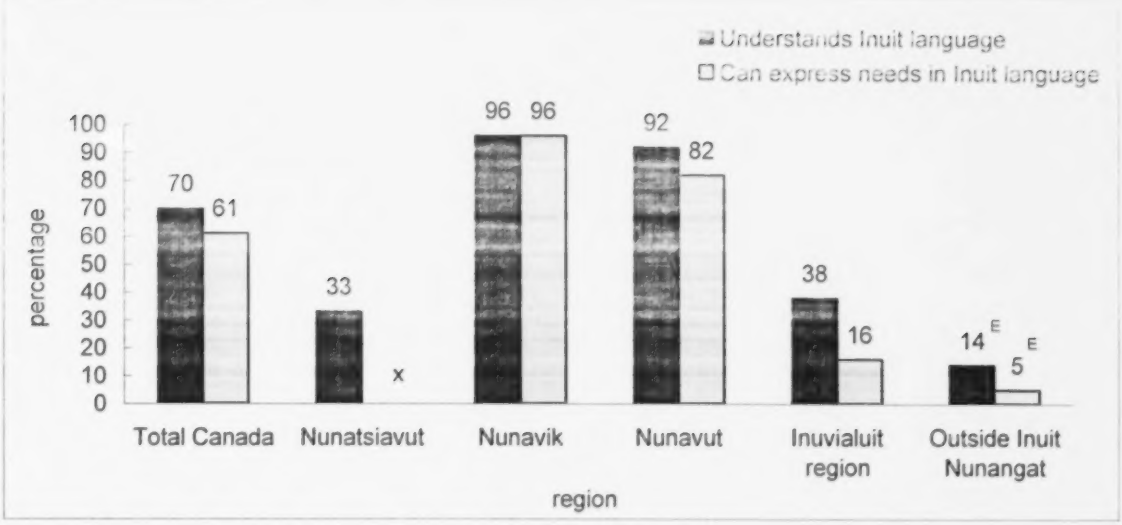
- According to the 2006 Census, about 4,500 or 64% of Inuit children under the age of six had the Inuit language as their mother tongue—the first language they learned and still understood. This was the same percentage as in 1996.

- In 2006, about three-quarters (76%) of Inuit children under the age of six in Nunavut and nearly all Inuit children (97%) in Nunavik had the Inuit language as their mother tongue. In Nunatsiavut and the Inuvialuit region, less than 5% of young Inuit children had an Inuit language mother tongue. Outside Inuit Nunangat, the figure was 12%.

The Aboriginal Children's Survey provides information on other language concepts—children's ability to express their needs in the Inuit language and how well they can understand the language.

- About seven in 10 (70%) Inuit children in Canada aged 2 to 5 - the age at which children are usually able to speak - could understand the Inuit language when someone spoke it to them. A smaller percentage (61%) could express their needs in the language.

Chart 1
Percentage of Inuit children aged 2 to 5 able to understand and express their needs in the Inuit language by region, 2006



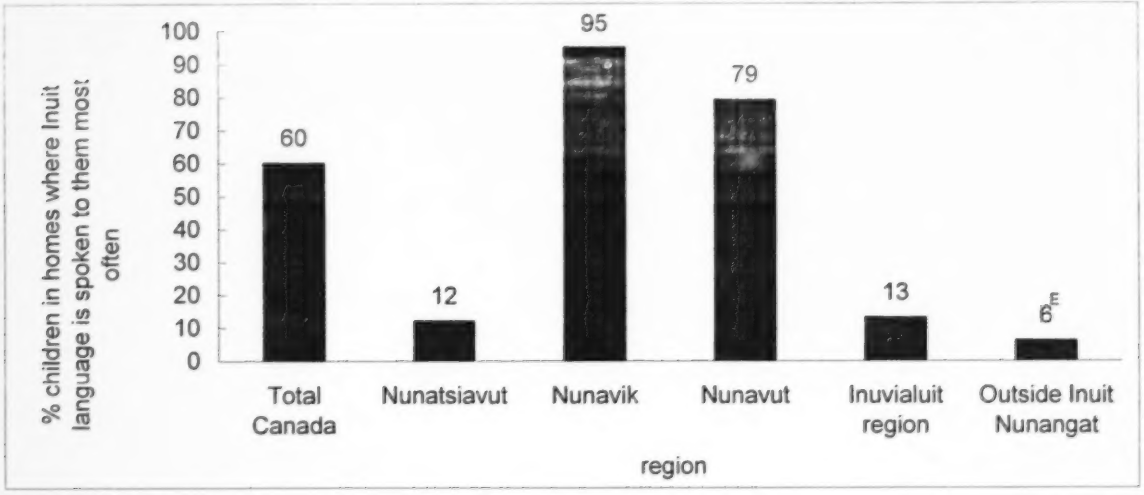
Source(s): Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Children's Survey, 2006.

- Nationally, about one-quarter (26%) of Inuit children could express their needs in the Inuit language only while 36% could express themselves in the Inuit language and English and/or French. Just under four in 10 (37%) Inuit children could not express themselves in the Inuit language.

Exposure to the Inuit language at home

- For 60% of Inuit children in Canada under the age of six, the Inuit language was the language spoken to them most often at home.

Chart 2
Percentage of Inuit children under the age of six living in homes where the Inuit language was spoken to them most often by region, 2006



Source(s): Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Children's Survey, 2006.

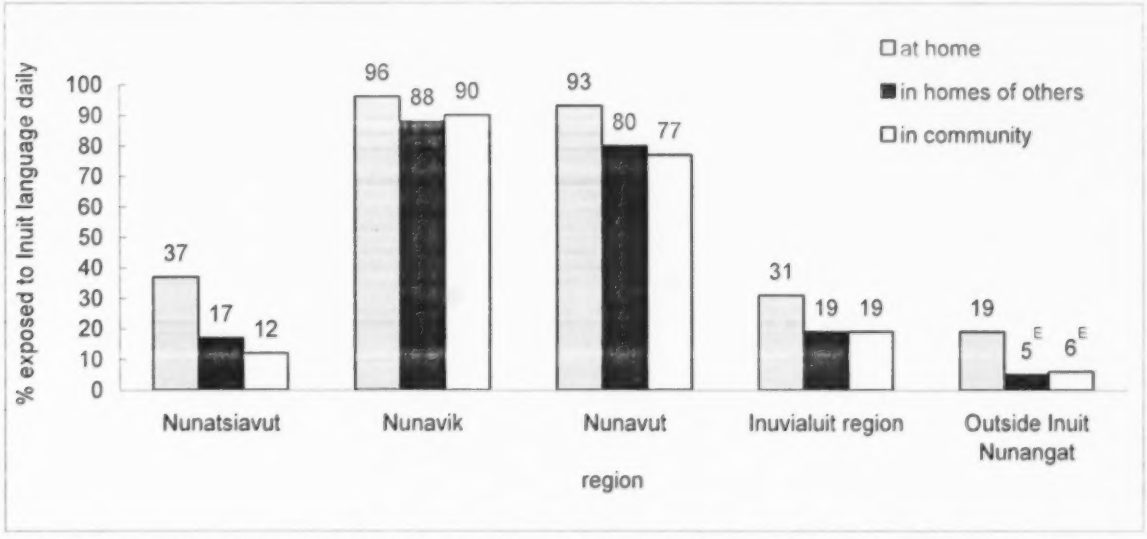
- The Aboriginal Children's Survey asked how often children were exposed to the Inuit language at home. About seven in 10 Inuit children (72%) under the age of six in Canada were exposed to the Inuit language in their home every day.

- Over eight in 10 (83%) Inuit children exposed to the Inuit language at home every day were able to express their needs in the Inuit language, compared to less than 10% of Inuit children who did not have daily home exposure.

The Inuit language in the community

- About six in 10 (59%) Inuit children in Canada were exposed to the Inuit language on a daily basis at the homes of others. In addition, 58% were exposed to the Inuit language elsewhere in their community every day.

Chart 3
Percentage of Inuit children under the age of six exposed to the Inuit language every day in various places by region, 2006



Note(s): Data were not available specifically for the Inuit language. Percentages include a small number of Inuit children exposed to an Aboriginal language other than the Inuit language.
Source(s): Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Children's Survey, 2006.

- Inuit children were more likely to speak the Inuit language if they were exposed to it in many settings. Just over half (52%) of young Inuit children who were exposed to the Inuit language every day at home only could express their needs in the language, compared to 89% of those exposed to the language daily at their home, in the homes of others and elsewhere in the community.

- Smaller percentages of Inuit children in all regions were exposed to the Inuit language daily through media such as TV, radio, books or DVD's. In Nunavik, about half (49%) of Inuit children were exposed to the Inuit language through these media every day, followed by 38% of children in Nunavut and 19% of children in the Inuvialuit region. Outside Inuit Nunangat, the figure was less than 10%. The figure for Nunatsiavut was suppressed for confidentiality reasons.

Childcare arrangements can also provide settings for passing on the Inuit language to younger speakers.

- Four in 10 (40%) Inuit children in Canada under the age of six were in some type of regular child care arrangement (with someone other than a parent). This included arrangements such as daycare, preschool, Head Start, after school programs, care by a relative and so on.

- Among Inuit children in a regular childcare arrangement, just over half (55%) were in childcare where the Inuit language was used most often.

- In Nunavik, 91% of Inuit children in childcare received care in the Inuit language followed by 79% of Inuit children in Nunavut. For the Inuvialuit region, the figure was 26% and 18% for children in Nunatsiavut. The figure for outside Inuit Nunangat was suppressed for confidentiality reasons.

Inuit language exposure and family characteristics

- Nationally, two-thirds (64%) of Inuit children had at least one parent with the Inuit language as their mother tongue.

- In Nunavik and Nunavut, most young Inuit children had at least one parent with the Inuit language as their mother tongue—91% and 84% respectively. Figures were lower in Nunatsiavut (21%) and the Inuvialuit region (28%). Outside Inuit Nunangat, about 10% of Inuit children had at least one parent with the Inuit language as their first language.

- Inuit children whose parent spoke the Inuit language as their first language were more likely to be exposed to the language at home every day—94% compared to 31% for those whose parent did not have the Inuit language as their mother tongue.

- Older Inuit are more likely than the young to have the Inuit language as their mother tongue. In Inuit Nunangat, 74% of Inuit children under the age of six had the Inuit language as their mother tongue compared to 91% of those aged 65 and over.

- In 2006, 18% of Inuit children lived in a home that included a grandparent. These children were more likely than those living without a grandparent to be exposed to the Inuit language on a daily basis—80% compared to 70% respectively.

Hopes and expectations of parents

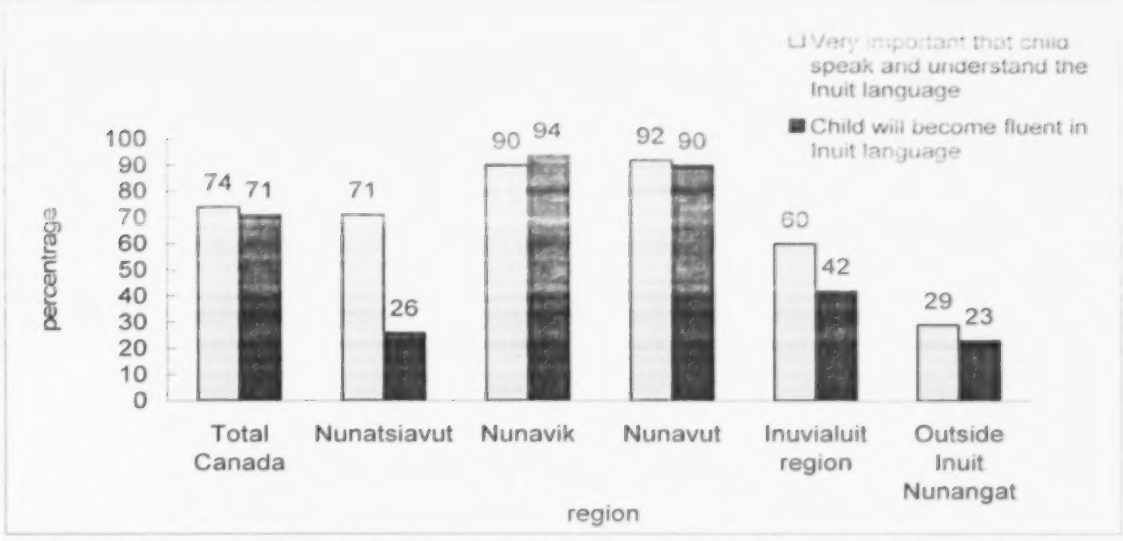
- At the national level, about three-quarters (74%) of Inuit children had a parent who said it was very important that their child speak and understand the Inuit language. (chart 4).

- Just over seven in 10 (71%) young Inuit children had a parent who believed that their child would become fluent in the Inuit language.

- In the Inuvialuit region and especially in Nunatsiavut, the majority of parents of Inuit children said it was very important that the child speak and understand the language. However, a much smaller percentage felt the child would become fluent.

Chart 4

Proportion of Inuit children under the age of six whose parent thought it was very important that the child speak and understand the Inuit language, and who thought their child would become fluent in the language, by region, 2006



Note: Data were not available specifically for the Inuit language. A small number of Inuit children are included whose parents may be referring to an Aboriginal language other than the Inuit language.
Source(s): Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Children's Survey, 2006

- This gap between parents' language hopes and expectations for their children could point to the importance of resources and opportunities for Inuit children to learn and speak the language in a variety of settings—at home, at school and in the community at large, as is the case in Nunavut, and especially Nunavik.

Some regional language initiatives

In each of the four Inuit regions, there are many Inuit language initiatives. A few are discussed here.

- In most of the communities in the Inuvialuit region, both Inuvialuktun (the dialect of the Inuit language spoken by some in the Western Arctic) and English are used in child development/Head start programs.

- In Hopedale, Nunatsiavut, a 'language nest' program has been introduced to expose babies and their parents to the Inuit language. Children between the ages of three months and two years are spoken to solely in Inuktitut (Canadian Heritage, 2008).

- In Nunavik, kindergarten through to grade two is taught solely in the Inuit language, the mother tongue of most Inuit children in the region. In other grades, some courses are taught in English, others in the Inuit language (Kativik School Board).

- In Nunavut, the *Inuit Language Protection Act* provides the right to receive education in the Inuit language from kindergarten to grade three, with Inuit language in the classroom for other grades by 2019.[1]

1. For more details on the act, go to: http://www.google.ca/search?hl=en&source=hp&q=inuit+language+protection+act&meta=&aq=0&oq=inuit+language+prot

What you should know about this fact sheet

The Aboriginal Children's Survey was developed by Statistics Canada and Aboriginal advisors from across the country and was conducted jointly with Human Resources and Social Development Canada. The survey took place between October 2006 and March 2007. Parents or guardians of approximately 10,500 Aboriginal children under six years of age, including about 1,700 Inuit children, provided information through a combination of personal and telephone interviews. The overall response rate for the survey was 81.1%.

For this survey, the parent or guardian responded on behalf of the child. For the majority of Inuit children (79%), this person was the birth mother or father. Grandparents, foster parents and adoptive parents made up the majority of the remaining parents or guardians who responded to the survey for Inuit children.

In this fact sheet, 'Inuit children' include children whose parents or guardians identified them as Inuit in response to the question: 'Is (child) an Aboriginal person, that is, North American Indian, Métis or Inuk?' Inuit children include those who were identified as Inuit only and those identified as Inuit in combination with another Aboriginal group, either North American Indian (First Nations) or Métis.

Data were not always available specifically for the Inuit language. Some percentages include a small number of Inuit children with an Aboriginal language other than the Inuit language. In addition, data on mother tongue are only available for the parent or guardian who responded to the survey, but not for their spouse/partner nor for their child.

For more detailed information on the Aboriginal Children's Survey, please consult the *Aboriginal Children's Survey 2006 Concepts and Methods Guide* (catalogue number 89-634).

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